

# FITNESS

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## **Physical Inactivity-What's the Problem?**

Increasingly, researchers are learning that regular exercise and good nutrition are critical to sustained good health. In fact, estimates are that some 300,000 deaths each year in the U. S. are the results of physical inactivity and poor eating habits. These deaths range across a number of diseases, from heart disease and stroke to colon cancer and diabetes. Good exercise and nutrition habits, especially if formed in childhood (although it is never too late to change one's habits), can help prevent high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol, which contribute to heart disease and stroke. They can reduce obesity, which is closely associated with these diseases, as well as with diabetes and certain types of cancer. They also help in building strong bones, which are needed to prevent osteoporosis later in life. Other benefits include anxiety and stress reduction, improved self-esteem, and general feelings of well-being.

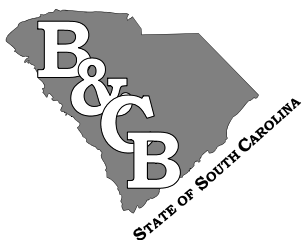
Physical activity levels tend to decrease as a person ages. Of youths aged 12 and 13, 69 percent are regularly physically active, but the number drops to 38 percent for young people between 18 and 21. A physically inactive child is more likely to become a physically inactive adult, which can lead to chronic disease and premature death. Between 1991 and 1997, the percentage of students who attended a daily physical education class dropped from 42 percent to 27 percent. The lack of organized physical activity in our nation's schools sends a false message to young people that being active isn't important. Daily opportunities to burn calories have diminished. We now see fewer sidewalks and a greater emphasis on driving rather than walking or bicycling. Also, our society is more automated and we have labor-saving devices at work and home. These problems, along with popular sedentary activities such as watching TV and using computers, have all contributed to the decline of physical activity.

## **Can It Be Prevented?**

Yes. Physical activity and a healthy diet can enhance health and prevent disease. Both children and adults need to find ways to increase the amount of weight-bearing (e.g., running, walking) and aerobic (e.g., biking, swimming) exercise. They also need to give greater attention to diets low in fat, high in fiber, calcium and fruits and vegetables to promote better health.

To learn more about becoming physically active visit [www.healthierus.gov](http://www.healthierus.gov)

Source: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)



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